



DestiMED PLUS

*Project report
card 2*

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MAXIMIZING BENEFITS OF NATURE-BASED TOURISM: TRANSFORMING INDUSTRY, RESPONDING TO NEW DEMANDS

DestiMED PLUS' [first report card](#) looked at the ways in which the project is supporting Protected Areas (PAs) as tourism destinations. In this second card, we focus on how destinations are transforming the tourism industry and local value chains to adapt to the types of visitors they expect, their source markets, and the expectations and involvement of the local communities they work with. Sustainable tourism in PAs supports livelihoods and creates opportunities for the communities that live nearby, simultaneously supporting biodiversity conservation. A [World Bank study](#) has quantified the impacts of PA tourism on local economies to demonstrate that this form of tourism really is good business, stimulating local economies, generating significant income multipliers, and creating job opportunities. Key to this is the creation of high quality, sustainable multi-day ecotourism packages which minimize the environmental footprint of nature-based tourism and contribute to a change in tourist habits and behavior. The expectations of tourists themselves are changing, as a recent Booking.com

[sustainable travel report](#) highlights, and sustainability is not just seen as a nice-to-have feature, but as central. Tourists want activities that exemplify the natural wealth and value of destinations, going deeper into history, traditions, gastronomy and a range of authentic experiences.

The [DestiMED PLUS approach](#) supports local operators and incoming agencies as key actors for sustainable tourism in PAs, along with park management, in contributing to the transformation of tourism value chains in destinations and ensuring alignment of the tourism offer with the environmental, cultural and socio-economic goals of PAs and their communities. This has ongoing effects on their approach to tourism in general, and the reasoning and resources they bring to their work. It is a virtuous cycle, stimulating interest in conservation and nature-based tourism, with many tourism operators seeing sustainability as the way forward.

In the following pages we look more closely at examples from tourism operators in Sardinia and Croatia.

Some key resources for sustainable local business initiatives:

- ▶ MEET NETWORK – [Online Training, a Manual, Sustainability monitoring](#), methods and tools, including the Ecological Footprint Calculator by the [Global Footprint Network](#).
- ▶ IUCN – [Guidelines and case studies](#) for businesses in the tourism sector.
- ▶ UN ONE PLANET NETWORK – resources for [Transforming Tourism Value Chains](#).
- ▶ GLASGOW DECLARATION – [Tools and Resources for Climate Action](#).
- ▶ GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COUNCIL – [Global Standards and Certification Programmes](#) for tour operators and service providers.
- ▶ WORLD BANK – [Nature-Based Tourism, Tools and Resources Collection](#).
- ▶ THE TRAVEL FOUNDATION – [resources and training](#) for businesses and destinations, to raise awareness on tourism's "invisible burden".
- ▶ EUROPEAN TRAVEL COMMISSION – [Encouraging Sustainable Tourism Practices](#), a handbook that showcases successful case studies.



SMALL CHANGES, BIG DIFFERENCE IN SARDINIA

In developing tourism locally, Biking Sardinia is evolving and building more sustainable tourism products, aided by their involvement in the DestiMED PLUS project.

“Working with the project has made us more conscientious in our approach to tourism. First, concerning the sustainability of our operations, and second, in our product design. Previously we had no viable model for creating low-impact products. Working with the project has raised our awareness about being more environmentally friendly, avoiding plastic, and being more energy efficient with transport. We have adapted our other tours, taking tips from the project’s ecotourism product, using recycled materials (t-shirts and water bottles) and using electric vehicles and bike transfers as much as possible.

Most importantly, this process of change in operations and products reflects the transformation of tourists’ perception concerning sustainability.

“Tourists are definitely becoming more aware of the environmental and

sustainability impacts of tourism – especially northern Europeans – and our products reflect this. Our tours now place more focus on cultural activities such as museum visits and cooking lessons, and alternative outdoor activities like hiking and sailing. This change in product design has carried over to the way we promote our products as being more rounded experiences. Prior to the project we had a well established process to build on to be sustainable. We worked with the park, developing products in a collaborative way. I would say that 95% of our tours are within the park.

Being part of the project has been a privilege, not only in terms of the activities here in Sardinia but also the opportunity to travel to other regions in the Mediterranean and get to know the wider project community, like other tour operators. This opportunity to connect feels especially important considering the pandemic.”

We spoke to Giovanni Scarpa, the Marketing Manager at Biking Sardinia, working with DestiMED PLUS partner the Region of Sardinia and the project pilot site Porto Conte Regional Park.

“Porto Conte’s fundamental commitment has been in slow and sustainable mobility. Most of the transfers of the group of testers were by electric bike, which allowed us to enjoy the territory and its treasures in a more vivid way. The smell of the countryside, brushing the vines and olive trees as we passed, and the heart-stopping views as we moved from one place to another. It was a great success to get closer not only to the landscape but also to the rural island life. And this is the perfect way to travel: know and feel places as a local, and appreciate and take care of them as a local too.”

Beatriz López was one of eight ecotourism experts who visited Porto Conte Regional Park to test the package developed there using the [MEET Network](#) model.

[Read more.](#)



SHARED VALUES AND TEAM WORK IN CROATIA

Tihana Dakić-Barichievich has been working in the tourism industry for 27 years, and she can bear witness to the fact that a lot has changed, including the awareness of local people and tourists. The DestiMED PLUS project is part of this change, and has had an impact on the way tourism is developing on the islands of Cres and Lošinj.

“More and more tourists seek a sustainable approach. Before, tourists who visited our island mostly looked forward to the sea, sunbathing and relaxing, and rarely wanted alternative activities, nature walks and so on. But this is changing – out of season now we are visited by tourists who want to stay in nature and stay longer. We have branded Lošinj the ‘Island of Vitality’, and expanded our offer, so tourists who visit us are aware that we enjoy living here all year round, and that we do not depend only on tourist visits in July and August. On the island we build with natural materials, respecting nature

(Cres Lošinj is a Natura2000 site), we inform our guests about saving water, sustainable energy, garbage sorting, and the seasonal offer of food and organic products”.

The project has also highlighted the fact that governance, conservation and an attractive ecotourism product can go hand in hand, and has demonstrated the importance of team work.

“Sharing the workload I learned a lot, I felt that I was not alone – this project is successful because I had a team! DestiMED PLUS confirmed to me that without the synergy of the whole community, progress is not possible. It validates my long-standing opinion that there is no competition in this business, only a common goal: a happy client who recounts the beauties of our island to the world. We want to make every guest a friend of Lošinj, learn from each guest what we can improve or change, constantly developing our approach.”

We spoke to Tihana Dakić-Barichievich from the tourism agency Asl (Veli Lošinj, Croatia), working with the Institute of Tourism Croatia, a DestiMED PLUS project partner.

“The island inspires tranquillity and peace. We walk through the small alleys to the Scented Garden, filled with lavender, to discover indigenous plants and herbs...every corner is filled with quaint artefacts put together artistically by our host ... Later we explore the coastline, walking around the signposted route towards Cikat under a forest of Aleppo pine trees...There is so much more to say about this paradise. I leave feeling totally regenerated”

Linda Botha from Walking Wine Tours, South Africa, was one of the ecotourism experts who visited Cres Lošinj Marine Protected Area.

[Read more.](#)

Photographs:
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